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Chairman: Mr. CISSÉ (Senegal)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 102: PREPARATION FOR AND ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS YEAR FOR TOLERANCE (A/49/457)

1. Mr. BATU (Turkey) said that, despite appeals for tolerance over many centuries from great thinkers of a variety of faiths, humankind appeared to be no nearer the ideal enshrined in the Charter. He hoped that the year 1995, which the General Assembly had proclaimed the United Nations Year for Tolerance, would usher in a new enlightenment, generating an aspiration to go beyond mutual indulgence, which was the bare minimum of tolerance, towards a culture of peace based rather on mutual forgiveness and constructive idealism. The Year for Tolerance should attempt to instil the notion of tolerance as the creative force behind the natural order of life based on peace, dignity and justice. He hoped that the Year for Tolerance would be adopted by consensus.

2. Mrs. AOUIJ (Tunisia) said that the proclamation of the Year for Tolerance would allow the international community to reaffirm its adherence to the principles of the Charter. The many and varied forms of intolerance still in existence included religious extremism, which led to the use of religion to justify a range of policies and behaviour. It was important, therefore, that States dedicated themselves to preserving freedom of religion in order to make the values of tolerance, implying acceptance of others with all their differences and peculiarities, a part of daily life.

3. Tunisia had enshrined freedom of religion in its Constitution, as exemplified by a Jewish minority which had preserved all its cultural traditions. In conjunction with UNESCO's programme of action for the Year for Tolerance, it was to organize a meeting on tolerance around the Mediterranean, which would aim to encourage dialogue between different cultures, religions and societies in the area. The meeting would examine the way in which a spirit of tolerance could be developed in children and educational institutions, and the role of religious expression, public opinion and the media in fostering tolerance. She called on the international community to head off the forces of intolerance through similar use of reason and freedom of expression.

4. Mr. SACIRBEY (Bosnia and Herzegovina) welcomed UNESCO's role in organizing the Year for Tolerance. In former times, tolerance had been the keynote of life in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with many faiths and cultures coexisting in harmony for centuries. Despite the war and Serbian attempts to sever ties between the people and the occupied lands, leading to the destruction of their heritage, his country's essential tolerance for different cultures, nationalities and religions had survived, thanks to the commitment of the people of Bosnia.

5. However, the message sent by the United Nations to the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina was that they were not permitted to defend their multi-ethnic society against an aggressor determined to establish an ethnically pure society; that, through a process of so-called "evenhandedness", the Bosnian people, who supported multi-culturalism, were no better than those who despised

multi-culturalism; and that, through negotiations and map-making, it was better to succumb to aggression and forsake their multi-ethnic society, and live along ethnic lines.

6. He urged Member States to use the United Nations Year for Tolerance as an opportunity to review their commitment to the principles to which they had subscribed, particularly in relation to their response to the needs of the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina. He called on Member States to ensure the integrity of the United Nations Year for Tolerance by making any necessary adjustments to their foreign and national policies.

7. Mr. VAN DER WESTHUIZEN (South Africa) said that his country firmly favoured a global Year for Tolerance, and that it was ready to share its experience in negotiation, conflict resolution, the creation of peace structures, democracy, reconciliation and nation-building. Tolerance, which was a universal need, had been central to transforming South Africa from a deeply-divided society into one founded on the recognition of human rights, democracy, peaceful coexistence and equal development opportunities for all. The diversity of the South African people had benefited the negotiation process, through which a lively sense of national interest had developed, culminating in the country's first non-racial elections. That event had further consolidated tolerance, without which the new constitutional model would not succeed.

8. South Africa had already actively demonstrated its concern to promote tolerance in the surrounding region by working with neighbouring countries to facilitate solutions to domestic and inter-State problems. It also intended to participate actively in the mechanism conceived by the Organization of African Unity for the prevention, management and resolution of conflict, while at the international level, it offered its assistance in preparing and organizing the United Nations Year for Tolerance and in implementing activities and programmes aimed at promoting tolerance.

9. Mr. GUJRAL (India) said that the greatest test of tolerance came in pluralistic societies where, although diversity was a source of strength, it also invited ideologically motivated conflict. The programme of action for the Year for Tolerance should be a starting-point for long-term action, as the Director-General of UNESCO had suggested. However, it would have value for the future only if it was based on a statement of principles. Similarly, the declaration on tolerance should be drafted in such a way as to reflect all cultures impartially. He welcomed the many proposals for activities in connection with the Year for Tolerance and the listing of the fundamental concerns of the idea of tolerance. In India, the Year for Tolerance had been linked with the one hundred twenty-fifth anniversary of the birth of Mahatma Gandhi and a national committee had been set up to celebrate that event.

10. He was concerned at the media's role in conflict situations, and suggested that UNESCO's programme of action could profitably include a study of the principles of restraint applied by the Indian media when reporting internal tension, aiming not to exacerbate but to reduce such tension. The idea that tolerance began in the home should become central to the work of United Nations

agencies and should be incorporated into educational and practical programmes implemented by Governments. In India non-governmental organizations, backed by legislation and the media, had had marked success in promoting intercommunal harmony.

11. Mr. BRAHA (Albania) fully supported the activities proposed by UNESCO with the aim of promoting tolerance throughout the world, for which the need was clearer than ever. Regretting the manifestations of ethnic intolerance that increased tension and conflict, he said that the "ethnic cleansing" committed by the Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina should not go unpunished. Likewise, the "cleansing" of ethnic Albanians in Kosova should not escape international attention. Moves to combat all forms of racism, xenophobia and related intolerance, coupled with the promotion of tolerance, contributed significantly to regional and international peace, stability and cooperation.

12. In Albania, where equality before the law and respect for diversity were important factors, the three main religious communities lived in exemplary peace and harmony, while minorities were fully integrated into society and coexisted harmoniously with the majority. Albania's continued measures to consolidate democracy and full respect for human rights provided a secure basis for the promotion of tolerance between people. It offered its modest contribution to the activities related to the United Nations Year for Tolerance, which he indeed hoped would serve to foster and develop tolerance.

13. Mrs. ABDEL GALIL (Sudan) said that the virtue of tolerance, which was a cornerstone of Islam, contributed effectively to democracy and peace and should be promoted by United Nations agencies and governmental organizations with a view to better accomplishing their assigned tasks. Noting that regional and international initiatives were to be accorded priority, she referred to two conferences on religion held recently in Khartoum under the banner of enhancing peaceful coexistence. The ensuing recommendations focused on measures designed to establish a country-wide dialogue between religions, improve religious education, ensure freedom of religious worship and promote religious tolerance.

14. The Sudan was making its own contribution to the spread of tolerance; it had recently received a delegation from the World Council of Churches, with which it had long-standing relations, and Pope Paul II had also conducted a visit. Such events conclusively proved the tolerance of the Sudanese people, which should be emulated elsewhere. Christians in the Sudan enjoyed full freedom to practise all tenets of their faith, including the celebration of religious feasts. They also participated in the political and executive apparatus of the State. Finally, she confirmed that the Sudan supported the Secretary-General's proposals for the preparation and organization of the United Nations Year for Tolerance, as well as the UNESCO proposal to proclaim one day in 1995 as a "Day for Tolerance".

15. Mrs. KOUALSKA (Ukraine) said that, on the eve of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations, nothing could be more appropriate than for its Member States to join together to promote tolerance and peace. The end of ideological confrontation had opened the way for greater freedom and democracy, but the

world was still confronted with many problems of discrimination as well as other social and environmental ills. It was therefore more necessary than ever to build tolerance among States and peoples. As the proposed declaration on tolerance indicated, while many of the world's problems were intractable, without tolerance one could not even begin to solve them.

16. Her country urged all Governments to take adequate measures at the regional and national levels. In that spirit, it welcomed the resolution of the General Conference of UNESCO regarding the United Nations Year for Tolerance and the draft declaration on tolerance. Ukraine believed in the importance of tolerance among all groups in society and had made the rule of law and democracy a priority since regaining its independence three years previously.

17. Mrs. OLSZOWSKI (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)) said that, as the lead agency for the United Nations Year for Tolerance, UNESCO had intensified its efforts to encourage Member States in promoting tolerance and to implement an effective coordination strategy for the Year's events. The report of the UNESCO Director-General (A/49/457, annex) was based on suggestions, recommendations and information requested in 1993 from non-governmental organizations and from other United Nations agencies. Since that time, close cooperation had been established with the some 600 non-governmental organizations that had status with it, and they had formed an ad hoc group working to promote tolerance among young people, disadvantaged groups and the general public.

18. UNESCO would be following up the Year with a programme of action, perhaps including a statement of principles, all of which would be based on recommendations prepared by the meetings for the Year. The text of the proposed statement of principles would be discussed at those meetings and would be examined by the Executive Board in the spring of 1995.

19. At the April 1994 meeting of the Administrative Committee on Coordination, the Director-General of UNESCO had emphasized the fortuitous coincidence of the Year and the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations. As suggested by the Director-General on that occasion, many United Nations agencies had designated focal points to facilitate inter-agency coordination of projects in preparation for both events.

20. At the forty-fourth session of the International Conference on Education held at Geneva in October 1994, UNESCO had proposed a major educational campaign for tolerance as part of the Year's activities. That initiative was closely linked to the proposal adopted there for a "World Tolerance Day", which would be considered at the twenty-eighth session of the General Conference. The Year would also provide an appropriate occasion for disseminating the basic human rights instruments among schools and universities.

21. In addition, UNESCO would be working to achieve broad media coverage of the Year's events in order to make its message accessible to the general public. To that end, it would be issuing statements of purpose that clearly defined the philosophy of its activities for the Year.

AGENDA ITEM 101: PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN (continued) (A/49/411, 448, 478, A/49/532-S/1994/1179 and A/49/643; A/C.3/49/6 and 14)

22. Mr. EDWARDS (Marshall Islands) emphasized his country's commitment to improving children's education and living standards, as demonstrated by its early ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its active engagement in work to that end in the Pacific region. Having achieved many goals aimed at addressing the needs of children in the region, it had decreased its maternal and infant mortality rates and strengthened its immunization programmes. Efforts were also being made to improve the school curriculum and secure scholarship funding to enable gifted students to study abroad.

23. He hoped that UNICEF and other United Nations agencies would enhance their efforts in the Marshall Islands in the light of the recommendations contained in the Programmes of Action of the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States and the International Conference on Population and Development respectively. He also looked forward to his country's inclusion in UNICEF's next report on the state of the world's children. Meanwhile, work was continuing with a view to improving health indicators and creating job opportunities for the next generation. Acknowledging that outside help would be required in order to ensure that children in the Marshall Islands led poverty-free lives and were equipped to become productive members of society, he encouraged the international community to support his country's efforts, as well as those undertaken in the Pacific region generally.

The meeting rose at 4.40 p.m.